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CONDUCTOR

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*chamber music
recital*

R E S P I G H I

D E B U S S Y

M A H L E R

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Il Tramonto

In setting to music a poem by Shelley one would expect from the composer an outburst of exalted romanticism. Not so. Respighi was keenly aware of the predicament that the musical world faced at the turn of the century. The Verdian melodrama was giving way to the Verismo and Wagner's influence was still considerable, while new musical trends were coming in from France and from Russia. Respighi observed, pondered, and gradually emerged as a composer in his own right. Respighi composed *Il Tramonto* ('The Sunset') in 1918, two years after his first great achievement, *The Fountains of Rome*. It was a success from the start. It is written for mezzo-soprano and string quartet (with the addition of a double-bass part) or string orchestra, and it was in the latter form that it was premiered in Rome at the Accademia di Santa Cecilia, with Bernardino Molinari conducting and Chiarina Fino Savio, to whom the work is dedicated, singing the solo part. The whole work is pure musical poetry, intense in its expressiveness, crystalline yet colourful in its instrumentation, and delicate in its harmonies. But whether the mood is tender, contemplative, joyful or sad, the composer's imagination never strays from the links of the basic conception. The main idea is masterfully unfolded and moulds the music to the very end. Alfredo Bonavera © 1988

Prélude à l'après-midi d'un faune

Debussy began work on his *Prélude, interludes et paraphrase finale pour l'après-midi d'un faune* in 1892, inspired by Mallarmé's poem *L'après-midi d'un faune*. At this time he was a close friend of Mallarmé, being one of the intimates of his Tuesday circle which included many of the Parisian intellectuals of the period. Mallarmé first intended *L'après-midi* to be given on the stage, but this did not happen until after his death, when Diaghilev caused a scandal with a ballet set to Debussy's music. Mallarmé's own revisions to the poem, made between 1865 and 1876, if anything, reduced the work's suitability for the theatre, at least as a spoken work. He declared that his ideal of poetry was 'suggested by music proper, which we must raid and paraphrase if our own music, struck dumb, is insufficient'.

In spite of such admitted links with music, Debussy had no great confidence in his own ability to deal with the poem. In a letter of 1893 he wrote that he had played the *Prélude* on the piano to an admiring friend, but went on to lament, 'Here I am, already 31, still not sure of where I'm going and still with things to learn (like how to write masterpieces ...)'. The poem charts the progress of the faun's erotic fantasies in the afternoon heat. Though Debussy insisted his work gave only 'a general impression' of the poem, he admitted to a correspondence between the last five bars and the last line of the poem - 'Couple, farewell! I go to see the shadow you became'. The opening flute solo, too, may credibly be related to a line in the middle of the poem, 'Une sonore, vaine et monotone ligne': 'sonore', because the opening C sharp on the flute, although it is the instrument's open note, was always naturally out of tune on French flutes of the period, and rectifying this produced a peculiarly veiled and distant colouring; 'vaine et monotone' because of the repetition of the opening phrase and the feeling, common to the whole piece and to much of Debussy's music, that movement from one idea to the next is dictated not by stern logic but merely by a passing whim - 'mon plaisir', as he once called it. As to the stature of the work, we may listen and choose for ourselves along the scale between Boulez's claim that 'modern music was awoken by it', and Saint-Saëns's that it 'contains not the slightest musical idea in the true sense of the word'. The sound world is essentially a pastoral one, fashioned out of the sonorities of flute, horn and two harps, with much-divided strings providing for the most part a warm, cushioning background. Roger Nichols © 2010

The Sunset

Percy Bysshe Shelley (1792-1822)

Italian Translation by Roberto Ascoli

Già v'ebbe un uomo, nel cui tenue
spirto
(qual luce e vento in delicata nube
che ardente ciel di mezzo-giorno
stempri)
la morte e il genio contendeano. Oh!
quanta tenera gioia, che gli fè il
respiro venir meno
(così dell'aura estiva l'ansia talvolta)
quando la sua dama, che allor solo
conobbe l'abbandono pieno e il
concorde palpitar di due creature
che s'amano, egli addusse pei sentieri
d'un campo, ad oriente da una foresta
biancheggiante ombrato ed a
ponente scoperto al cielo!
Ora è sommerso il sole; ma linee
d'oro
pendon sovra le cineree nubi,
sul verde piano sui tremanti fiori
sui grigi globi dell' antico smirmio,
e i neri boschi avvolgono,
del vespro mescolandosi alle ombre.
Lenta sorge ad oriente
l'infocata luna tra i folti rami delle
piante cupe:
brillan sul capo languide le stelle.
E il giovine sussura: "Non è strano?
Io mai non vidi il sorgere del sole,
o Isabella. Domani a contemplarlo
verremo insieme." Il giovine e la dama
giacquer tra il sonno e il dolce amor
congiunti ne la notte: al mattin
gelido e morto ella trovò l'amante.

There late was One within whose
subtle being, As light and wind
within some delicate cloud. That
fades amid the blue noon's burning
sky, Genius and death contended.
None may know The sweetness of
the joy which made his breath Fail,
like the trances of the summer air,
When, with the Lady of his love, who
then First knew the unreserve of
mingled being He walked along the
pathway of a field Which to the east a
hoar wood shadowed o'er, But to the
west was open to the sky. There now
the sun had sunk, but lines of gold
Hung on the ashen clouds, and on the
points Of the far level grass and
nodding flowers And the old
dandelion's hoary beard, And,
mingled with the shades of twilight,
lay On the brown mossy woods --
and in the east The broad and
burning moon lingeringly rose
Between the black trunks of the
crowded trees, While the faint stars
were gathering overhead-- 'Is it not
strange, Isabel,' said the youth, 'I
never saw the sun? We will walk here
To-morrow; thou shalt look on it
with me.' That night the youth and
lady mingled lay In love and
sleep--but when the morning came
The lady found her lover dead and
cold.

Oh! nessun creda che, vibrando tal colpo,
fu il Signore misericorde.
Non morì la dama, né folle diventò:
anno per anno visse ancora.
Ma io penso che la queta sua
pazienza, e i trepidi sorrisi,
e il non morir... ma vivere a custodia
del vecchio padre
(se è follia dal mondo dissimigliare)
fossero follia. Era, null'altro che a
vederla, come leggere un canto da
ingegnoso bardo intessuto a piegar
gelidi cuori in un dolor pensoso.
Neri gli occhi ma non fulgidi più;
consunte quasi le ciglia dalle lagrime;
le labbra e le gote parevan cose
morte tanto eran bianche; ed esili le
mani e per le erranti vene e le
giunture rossa del giorno trasparia la
luce.

La nuda tomba, che il tuo fral
racchiude, cui notte e giorno
un'ombra tormentata abita, è quanto
di te resta, o cara creatura perduta!

"Ho tal retaggio, che la terra non dà:
calma e silenzio, senza peccato e
senza passione.
Sia che i morti ritrovino (non mai il
sonno!) ma il riposo,
imperturbati quali appaion,
o vivano, o d'amore nel mar profondo
scendano;
oh! che il mio epitaffio, che il tuo sia:
Pace!"
Questo dalle sue labbra l'unico
lamento.

Let none believe that God in mercy
gave That stroke.
The lady died not, nor grew wild,
But year by year lived on--in truth I
think Her gentleness and patience
and sad smiles, And that she did not
die, but lived to tend
Her agèd father, were a kind of
madness,
If madness 'tis to be unlike the world.
For but to see her were to read the
tale Woven by some subtlest bard,
to make hard hearts Dissolve away in
wisdom-working grief;--
Her eyes were black and lustreless
and wan: Her eyelashes were worn
away with tears, Her lips and cheeks
were like things dead--so pale;
Her hands were thin, and through
their wandering veins And weak
articulations might be seen Day's
ruddy light.
The tomb of thy dead self Which one
vexed ghost inhabits, night and day,
Is all, lost child, that now remains of
thee!
'Inheritor of more than earth can
give,
Passionless calm and silence
unreproved,
Whether the dead find, oh, not sleep!
but rest,
And are the uncomplaining things
they seem,
Or live, or drop in the deep sea of
Love;
Oh, that like thine, mine epitaph
were-- Peace!
This was the only moan she ever
made.

Kindertotenlieder

In February 1901, under the extreme pressure of overwork, Mahler collapsed with a severe haemorrhoidal haemorrhage, during which he was convinced that 'my last hour had come'. The event was to prove a turning point: during the following summer vacation, he composed seven Rückert songs—three of the *Kindertotenlieder* and four of what would become known as the cycle of *Rückert-Lieder*. Although the first three songs of *Kindertotenlieder* were composed in the same summer of 1901, with the last two following in 1904, their overall structure is unified by their key sequence. Thus the bleak D minor of the first song (only partially warmed into the major by the rising sun) returns in the storm – surely as much symbolic as real – of the finale, a storm that resolves into the D major of the final section. In the three intervening songs, Mahler underlines the shifting emotional field of the poems as they seek for understanding and consolation. *Nun seh' ich wohl, warum so dunkle Flammen*, in deciphering the message of the children's eyes, is full of lingering *appoggiaturas* ('O Augen!') and poignant changes of key. *Wenn dein Mütterlein* suggests a funeral march with Bachian overtones, but on an intimate scale that befits the domestic moment it recalls. Both these songs are in C minor. The E flat major of *Oft denk' ich, sie sind nur ausgegangen* by contrast has an open-air feel to it, with a lilting melody in sixths and warmer harmonies – the sidestep to G flat major on 'Bald werden sie wieder nach Hause gelangen!' is especially touching. The final song, *In diesem Wetter, in diesem Braus*, returns to D minor in a surging, raging tempest that is a challenge to an orchestra, never mind a pianist; significantly, the moment at which it blows itself out is signalled by the return of two little notes high above the staff, which had last been heard at the end of the first song. There follows a sublime apotheosis which, having first woven a celestial lullaby for the children, returns to earth in a long, consoling postlude for those left behind. Sentimental tradition often ascribes the composition of *Kindertotenlieder* to a premonition on Mahler's part of the tragic death of his own daughter in 1907. But he was already well acquainted with infant mortality, no fewer than eight of his siblings having died in childhood. And in his settings these poems, with their striking images of light and darkness, of regret and hope, of grief and consolation, found their perfect musical expression. Roger Vignoles © 2004

Kindertotenlieder

Friedrich Rückert (1788-1866)

I

Nun will die Sonn' so hell aufgehn,
Als sei kein Unglück die Nacht geschehn!
Das Unglück geschah nur mir allein! Die
Sonne, sie scheint allgemein!

Du mußt nicht die Nacht in dir
verschränken, Mußt sie ins ew'ge Licht
versenken!
Ein Lämplein verlösch in meinem Zelt!
Heil sei dem Freudenlicht der Welt!

I

Now the sun will rise as brightly as if no
misfortune had occurred in the night.
The misfortune has fallen on me alone.
The sun - it shines for everyone.

You must not keep the night inside you;
you must immerse it in eternal light.
A little light has been extinguished in my
household;
Light of joy in the world, be welcome.

II

Nun seh' ich wohl, warum so dunkle
Flammen
Ihr sprühtet mir in manchem
Augenblicke. O Augen, gleichsam, um
[m] einem Blicke Zu drängen eure ganze
Macht zusammen. Doch ahnt' ich nicht,
weil Nebel mich umschwammen,
Gewoben vom verblendenden Gesckicke,
Daß sich der Strahl bereits zur Heimkehr
schicke, Dorthin, von wannen alle
Strahlen stammen.
Ihr wolltet mir mit eurem Leuchten
sagen: Wir möchten nah dir immer
bleiben gerne!
Doch ist uns das vom Schicksal
abgeschlagen. Sieh' recht uns an, denn
bald sind wir dir ferne!
Was dir noch Augen sind in diesen Tagen:
In künft'gen Nächten sind es dir nur
Sterne.

III

Wenn dein Mütterlein
tritt zur Tür herein,
Und den Kopf ich drehe,
ihr entgegen sehe,
Fällt auf ihr Gesicht
erst der Blick mir nicht,
Sondern auf die Stelle,
näher nach der Schwelle,
Dort, wo würde dein
lieb Gesichten sein,
Wenn du freudenhelle
trätest mit herein,
Wie sonst, mein Töchterlein.
Wenn dein Mütterlein
tritt zur Tür herein,
Mit der Kerze Schimmer,
ist es mir, als immer
Kämt du mit herein,
huschtest hinterdrein,
Als wie sonst ins Zimmer!
O du, des Vaters Zelle,
Ach, zu schnell
erloschner Freudenschein!

II

Now I see well why with such dark flames
your eyes sparkled so often.
O eyes, it was as if in one full glance you
could concentrate your entire power.
Yet I did not realize - because mists
floated about me,
woven by blinding fate -
that this beam of light was ready to be
sent home
to that place whence all beams come. You
would have told me with your brilliance:
we would gladly have stayed near you!
But it is refused by Fate.
Just look at us, for soon we will be far!
What to you are only eyes in these days -
in future nights shall be stars to us.

III

When your mother dear
Entered through the door
And my head was turning
There to see her coming,
Falling not at first
There upon her face
But a little lower
Nearer to the threshold
Where one would find your
Dearest face to be
When, with joy so brightly,
You would step inside
As oft, my daughter dear.
When your mother dear
Entered through the door
With her candle glowing,
I still think as ever
That you would also
Hurry right behind
Here into the parlour.
But you, your father's cloister,
Were too quickly, too soon
Extinguished with his joy.

IV

Oft denk' ich, sie sind nur ausgegangen,
 Bald werden sie wieder nach Hause
 gelangen,
 Der Tag ist schön, o sei nicht bang,
 Sie machen nur einen weiten Gang.

Ja wohl, sie sind nur ausgegangen,
 Und werden jetzt nach Hause gelangen,
 O, sei nicht bang, der Tag ist schön,
 Sie machen nur den Gang zu jenen Höh'n.

Sie sind uns nur voraus gegangen,
 Und werden nicht hier nach Haus
 verlangen,
 Wir holen sie ein auf jenen Höh'n
 Im Sonnenschein, der Tag ist schön auf
 jenen Höh'n.

V

In diesem Wetter, in diesem Braus,
 Nie hätt' ich gesendet die Kinder hinaus;
 Man hat sie getragen hinaus,
 Ich durfte nichts dazu sagen!

In diesem Wetter, in diesem Saus,
 Nie hätt' ich gelassen die Kinder hinaus,
 Ich fürchtete sie erkranken;
 Das sind nun eitle Gedanken.

In diesem Wetter, in diesem Graus,
 Nie hätt' ich gelassen die Kinder hinaus;
 Ich sorgte, sie stürben morgen,
 Das ist nun nicht zu besorgen.

In diesem Wetter, in diesem Graus!
 Nie hätt' ich gesendet die Kinder hinaus!
 Man hat sie hinaus getragen,
 ich durfte nichts dazu sagen!

In diesem Wetter, in diesem Saus, in
 diesem Braus,
 Sie ruh'n als wie in der Mutter Haus,
 Von keinem Sturm erschreckt,
 Von Gottes Hand bedeckt.

IV

Often I think that they have only stepped
 out-
 and that soon they will reach home again.
 The day is fair - O don't be afraid -
 They are only taking a long walk.

Yes: they have only stepped out
 and will now return home.
 O don't be anxious - the day is fair.
 They are only taking a walk to those hills.

They have simply gone on ahead:
 they will not wish to return home.
 We'll catch up to them on those hills.
 in the sunshine the day is fair.

V

In this weather, in this windy storm,
 I would never have sent the children out;
 They were carried outside -
 I could say nothing about it!

In this weather, in this roaring storm,
 I would never have let the children out.
 I was afraid they had fallen ill,
 but these thoughts are now idle.

In this weather, in this cruel storm,
 I would never have let the children out;
 I was worried they would die the next
 day -
 but this is now no concern.

In this weather, in this cruel storm,
 I would never have sent the children out;
 They were carried outside -
 I could say nothing about it!

In this weather, in this roaring, cruel
 storm,
 they rest as they did in their mother's
 house:
 they are frightened by no storm,
 and are covered by the hand of God.

-English Translation by Emily Ezust

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